

BETTER TOGETHER

2018 ATSA Conference | Thursday October 18 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

T-05

'I'm Grieving': A Qualitative Analysis of Families' Experiences of Having a Family Member Convicted of a Sexual Offence

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Families have been highlighted as one of the most influential protective factors in reducing reoffending (Codd, 2008). Despite this, maintaining relationships between families and prisoners convicted of a sexual offence is more complicated. For example, the offence may have been against a family member, resulting in visiting restrictions for family members for purposes of safeguarding (Farmer, 2017). In addition, family members may be reluctant or unable to support a relative who has committed a sexual offence. In both such examples, the prisoner's sense of emotional isolation (a putative dynamic risk factor for reoffending) may be exacerbated. As families can act as an important buffer against criminality, it is important to investigate their experiences of having a relative convicted of a sexual offence, and to understand how prisons can make the experience of visiting their relative as rewarding and easy as possible.

This research study sought to understand the experiences of family members visiting a prison which housed a relative of theirs, following their relative's conviction for a sexual offence. This paper presents the qualitative analysis of the accounts offered by friends or family of people convicted of a sexual offence. Semi structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants, and the interview data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The analysis outlines a number of themes including the traumatic experiences reported by family and friends, changes in their mindsets, the alienation experienced by relatives and their enthusiasm to help with the desistance process. Implications of this analysis are discussed with reference to protective and risk factors, prevention, and in the context of a broader debate around the role of family and friends in desistance.

Learning Goals:

- To understand the experiences of friends and family of people convicted of a sexual offence.
- To learn from the accounts of friends and family of those convicted of a sexual offence and relate learned outcomes to secondary and tertiary prevention work.
- To identify factors that facilitate families and friends visiting people convicted of a sexual offence, and to reflect on how to improve the connections between prisoners and their families whilst attending to any pertinent issues around safeguarding.

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Dr Belinda Winder is a Professor in Forensic Psychology and Heads the Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit (SOCAMRU) in the Department of Psychology at Nottingham Trent University. She set SOCAMRU up in 2007 to build upon the collaborative relationship between ongoing research within the Department of Psychology at NTU and HMP Whatton (one of the largest prisons in Europe, holding approximately 830 convicted adult men who have been convicted of a sexual offence). The unit's primary aim is to conduct and facilitate applied research in the area of sexual offending and sexual crime. The unit works with the HMPPS, Ministry of Justice and the NHS and conducts research at a number of prisons (including HMP Whatton and HMP Stafford) and other secure forensic establishments. She has disseminated her work in a range of ways (presentations, professional reports, peer reviewed papers, articles for prisoners' newspapers, medical journals and so on) both internationally and nationally. Belinda specialises in mixed-method research with a strong service-user voice and an applied focus.

Belinda is a co-founder, trustee, Vice Chair and Head of Research and Evaluation for the Safer Living Foundation, a charity set up in 2014 to conduct (and evaluate) initiatives that help to prevent further victims of sexual crime.

Dr Nicholas Blagden is the Associate Head Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit (SOCAMRU) and Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychology at Nottingham Trent University. He is a Chartered Psychologist and has worked and researched within the criminal justice system and HM Prison Service for many years. He has taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses in psychology, forensic psychology and criminology. He has also trained police officers. His work has been funded by the HMPPS and he is currently engaged in numerous collaborative forensic projects with NTU, HMPPS, Institute for Mental Health, Ontario, Canada and Correctional Services Australia. He has published widely in international journals and disseminated research at international conferences.

Dr Christine Norman is a Senior Lecturer in psychology at Nottingham Trent University and a member of the Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit (SOCAMRU) at Nottingham Trent University. Christine's research and teaching interests are in the area of biological and cognitive psychology with application to psychiatric disorders, forensic psychology and behavioural addictions. She is part of the research team working closely with HMP Whatton one of Europe's largest sex offender prisons and is also involved in prevention research with non offending paedophiles.